1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
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CHAPTER XII

Occupation and Status

433 COUNTY CLARE, like other more westerly Irish counties agricultural in outlook, presents a picture in which there is little industrial activity at all, comparatively speaking, other than that involved in agriculture, trading in market towns, and administration and communication. The fact holds pretty generally for the whole of the south of Ireland.[1] Whether the inhabitants like it or not, Ireland has long been peripheral to the huge English industrial centers. It has been little more than a market and a source of foodstuffs. A western region like Clare has been nothing more. Ireland was called not very long ago "England's bread basket." But we have already seen, where economic matters have come up, that such a view of her is a bit astigmatic. Ireland was her own bread basket first, long before she was anything else.

288 178 In rural Ireland outside the large cities, other industrial activity than that involved in agriculture is merely a matter of supply and service, as far as the country people are concerned. The market towns, with their fairs, their shops, their banks, and their artisans and laborers, fill functions entirely distributive in nature.

This has not always been the situation. In 1810 the economist Wakefield found domestic woolen manufacture

[1] At the time of the authors' study the De Valera government's program of industrialization had hardly begun.

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
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a widespread industry among the country people throughout Ireland. There seems even then to have been quite a widespread cottage industry in wool and linen, later to be destroyed everywhere except in Ulster. The peasantry displayed great ingenuity at the craft. The wool of their sheep was made into frieze at home, carded, spun, woven, dyed, and consumed there. Oils essential to the weaving process were extracted from fern roots, and dyes were got from alder, walnut, oak, and elderberry. This craft survives today as a cottage industry only in remote parts of Donegal and Kerry and in the Scottish highlands and isles. Such home-spinning was once widespread, probably universal. It survived here and there down to a very late date. In Ulster and northern England the industry was gradually brought into the factory, where it laid the foundation for the industrial revolution. But in the rest of Ireland industrial production of woolens was confined to Dublin by 1840 and, as a commercial enterprise, the wool trade was dead except in the region of Belfast. A few small factories survived in several towns, for example at Limerick, Clonmel, and Bandon, but there was no life or power of expansion in them.

Other manufactures originally native to the country repeat the story of wool. A few attempts at cotton manufacture died out. Linen suffered the same fate. At one time flax was grown extensively throughout Ireland, and a home industry of weaving linen was practiced widely in both town and countryside in many parts of the country. O'Brien[2] cites evidence that the older custom in linen making, strongest in Ulster, but not unknown elsewhere, by which weavers occupied plots of land and supplemented their income by farming, was gone by the famine time.

[2] George O'Brien, *The Economic History of Ireland from the Union to the Famine* (London, New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1921). See also O'Brien, *The Economic History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin and London: Maunsel & Company, Ltd., 1918).

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
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Otway[3] describes the weavers of Drogheda in 1840 subsisting on conacre gardens (plots hired without right other than to the current crop) in circumstances of dire poverty.

O'Brien sums up his *Economic History* by concluding that the result of the first fifty years of the nineteenth century was that Ireland abandoned all pretense of being an industrial country and came to rely on agriculture to a greater extent than at any time formerly and even than in the eighteenth century. The accounts of Ireland at the time of the famine and after it bear him out. They show a very great lack of any kind of industrial activity other than agriculture.

The petty crafts of the countryside, which never gave any promise of reaching industrial proportions as those in the town centers might have, suffered a similar decline. But with them the decline seems to have come later and to have been part of the general change brought by the industrial revolution. All the supply crafts of the countryside have now come to be concentrated in the market towns. Nevertheless, through western regions, at least, local craftsmen, often with garden plots to help them eke out a living, seem to have long continued to be part of the local scene. In the novels of Carleton written just before and after the famine, many local shoemakers, cobblers, weavers, carpenters, smiths, coopers, nailers, and other followers of small trades appear. Upon them, the agricultural population depended for much of its tools and goods for local consumption. It is impossible to determine now how many of these were rural, since censuses of occupations before 1926 do not distinguish occupations in towns from those in country districts. But these men were part of the generally greater proportions of country dwellers before the rise of towns and the opening up of the railroads during the last century.

[3] Caesar Otway, *A Tour in Connaught* (Dublin: W. Curry, Jr., & Company, 1839).

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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weaver it would be hung in the rafters to be used as required. 248
Nowadays the scutching-mills cannot store all the flax they handle, so that the farmer stacks it in the fields until the mill can take it. It is built into large oblong stooks variously known as barts, sleighs, hovels or rays, containing as many as a hundred beets or more. The barts are two-storied. On top of the first storey, which consists of three rows of beets on each side, a row of sheaves is placed along each eave like wall-plates, and others are laid transversely between them. On these, in turn, a central row is placed lengthwise to act as a support for the upper storey, and against this row two or three layers of sheaves are laid like rafters on each side. The hipped roof is then thatched with grass or rushes roped on (Fig. 54). The bart[1] is thus kept

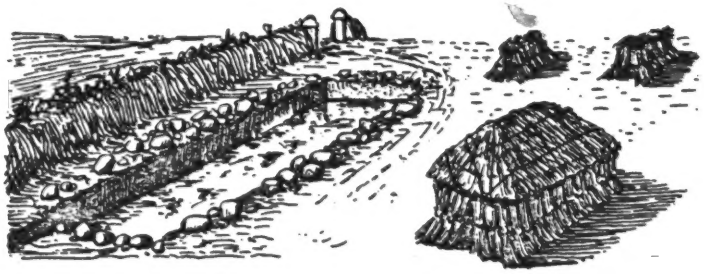

FIG. 54. Flax dam, stooks and bart.

dry while its open structure allows the wind to blow through, drying the beets and also lessening the risk of its being blown down. The farmer-weaver, needing the fibre, might have to dry the flax in a kiln after it had lain spread for a few days (Chapter IX). The whole sequence of breaking (melling) the flax, scutching, cloving, hackling, spinning, weaving, and bleaching was then carried out by hand. The water-driven scutching mill was 288
introduced in the eighteenth century though hand-scutching continued in some districts into the present century. All processes are now mechanized apart from a little high-quality handloom weaving in Ulster, and very little flax is home-grown even in the traditional linen districts.

[1] 'Bearts' of oats are referred to in medieval documents. See W. R. Wilde in *Census of Ireland 1851*, Part 5, Vol. 1, 98.

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which contain a large portion of the natural flora—herbs and shrubs—of the island. Stone fences delimit many hundreds of plots which compose most of the two-square-mile land surface of Inis Beag.

The island boasts a post office with radio-telephone facilities, a "national school" in which three teachers instruct ninety pupils in the seven "standards," two provision shops with attached "pubs," a former coast guard station now housing the nurse and a knitting industry which employs local girls, a lighthouse, and a chapel served by a curate who resides nearby. Inis Beag lacks electricity and running water, and the only vehicles are several ass-drawn carts which are able to travel the narrow, fence-bordered trails. A small "steamer" carrying supplies, passengers, and mail to and from a mainland port visits the island at least once each week. That Inis Beag has experienced far less cultural change than other island communities of Ireland is largely due to the fact that, in absence of a deep water quay, the steamer has had to stand off the strand and be met by "canoes." Most of the tourists who come to the island stay only for the hours that the steamer is anchored and go ashore mainly for the thrill of riding in the canoes, which the island men row with consummate skill. Insofar as I can discover, the inhabitants of Inis Beag are less prone to visit the mainland than are the peoples of other Irish islands.

INIS BEAG
HISTORY AND CULTURE[2]

The prehistory and history of Inis Beag are recorded dramatically in a multitude of monuments and artifacts of stone and metal, including Neolithic axe-heads and kitchen middens, Copper-Bronze Age gallery grave tombs and burial mounds of earth and stone, an Iron Age promontory fort, and medieval Christian monasteries, churches, cemeteries, stone houses, and a sacred well, as well as a three-story tower house built by the political overlords of the island. Irish nativists claim that the contemporary folk are lineal descendants of ancient, once civilized

[2] The culture described herein is that of 1959–1960 and excludes important changes which have occurred since then, such as those resulting from the introduction of television, a summer language school for pupils from the mainland, and free secondary education.